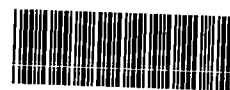


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## Cabot report finds chemicals but no health threats in whistleblower investigation

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A gas drilling company's investigation of spills and leaks alleged by a former employee at its Susquehanna County well sites found nothing in the streams, ponds and soil it sampled at levels that would pose a risk to human health except metals it said occur naturally in the region.

The investigation by an environmental contractor hired by Cabot Oil and Gas Corp. found substances that it said could indicate past spills from natural gas operations - including surfactants, chlorides and compounds associated with diesel fuel - at six of 11 well sites identified by the former employee. Those substances "were not commonly present in soil and surface water at the

well sites" and do not have state-mandated limits in soil and water, it said.

The report was submitted to the state Department of Environmental Protection this week. A spokeswoman said regulators are reviewing the report and plan to respond to Cabot in the next week.

The two-year investigation began in December 2009 when Dimock Twp. resident Scott Ely, then an employee of Cabot's drilling subsidiary GasSearch Drilling Services, outlined claims of hidden or ignored spills, leaking pits and shoddy practices to environmental regulators and Cabot officials.

Cabot's contractor, URS Corp., set out to "demonstrate that any releases or incidents alleged by Ely were either confirmed or proven not to have occurred," according to the report's introduction, but the report never specifies where spills were proven or disproven.

Instead, it details the investigation of 13 well sites, including analysis of samples from 25 soil test boreholes and 47 test pits as well as water-quality results from ponds and streams above and below the alleged spills.

Eleven of the sites were identified by Ely. The twelfth and thirteenth sites were added to the investigation when another landowner claimed that drilling fluids were transferred to a pit on his property with a torn liner and drilling workers revealed that a drum holding petroleum products and antifreeze was buried at a well site and later recovered partially empty.

According to the report, five sites revealed no substances other than metals the authors said occur naturally in the soil, sediment and surface water of the region. The metals, including elevated levels of arsenic, aluminum and iron, "do not indicate a release or impacts" from "Cabot's drilling activity at any well site," the report said.

Arsonic was found in soil samples at six well sites above statewide health standards. The metal is frequently found in the wastewater that flows back from Marcellus shale gas wells, but the report's authors said that "arsenic or arsenic-based compounds are not known to be used in drilling or hydraulic fracturing or in substances that are alleged by Ely to have been released at the various well sites evaluated."

Tests from six sites showed the presence of what URS called "indicator parameters" that "could indicate past releases from processes related to natural gas operations." The surfactant Methylene Blue Active Substances (MBAS) was found in soil at four well sites while diesel-range organics or other constituents of diesel fuel were found at four well sites.

Seven sites had low levels of volatile or semi-volatile organic compounds, classes of chemicals that can occur naturally but are often man-made and found in paints, fuel and industrial cleaners. None were found at levels above state health standards.

Some of those chemicals, including naphthalene, MBAS and bis(2-ethylhexyl) phthalate, were detected at low levels during recent Cabot water tests of 11 Dimock water wells. Cabot and Ely had opposite interpretations of the study Wednesday.

In a statement, Cabot spokesman George Stark said that the study "scientifically confirms that Ely was either mistaken or incorrect in every case" and that "no environmental harm or threat existed or exists for any incident alleged by Ely."

The company spent "hundreds of thousands of dollars over a two-year period to have each allegation investigated for environmental impact" and found that Ely's allegations "lacked substance," he said.

Lawyers with the New York firm Napoli Bern Ripka Shkolnik who represent Ely in a lawsuit against Cabot declined to comment specifically on the report because of pending litigation but said the chemicals found at the well sites clearly support Ely's story. They also noted that the study failed to investigate groundwater near the well sites.

Ely said the report "proves that I wasn't lying about what was happening on the job sites."

He said scientists will have to review the data more thoroughly to find out if it was conducted properly.



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